Chapter 3: Practical Politics

- The 1898 election season opened with Republican and Populist leaders loosing control of the Fusion movement. Both parties were fractured because of Governor Daniel L. Russell's inability to satisfy both sides. The resulting failure of Fusion spurred the rejuvenation of the Democratic Party.
- Furnifold Simmons was selected to chair the state Democratic Party campaign of 1898. Simmons and the Democrats developed a white supremacy argument as a primary campaign tool even as they pointed out shortcomings of the incumbent Fusion administration. Leading Democrat Josephus Daniels noted that Simmons used a three-pronged attack to win the election: men who could write, speak, and "ride."
 - ♦ Men who could write were used to create propaganda for newspapers and circulars provided by the Democratic Party. The Raleigh *News and Observer*, *Charlotte Observer*, *Wilmington Messenger* and the Wilmington *Morning Star* led the barrage.
 - Men who could speak were sent throughout the state to inflame white voters. Statewide speakers included future governor Charles B. Aycock, Robert Glenn, and Wilmington native Alfred Moore Waddell.
 - Men who could ride were recruited by clubs such as the White Government Union and Red Shirts. The clubs sought to intimidate blacks and press white Fusionists to vote for Democratic Party candidates.
- Wilmington's election campaign reflected the statewide program, and leading Democrats from across the state took special interest in securing victory in the city. Added to the campaign was a series of secret meetings in which leading white businessmen planned to retake control of the city after the election. The men, called the "Secret Nine," also mapped out a citywide plan of action in case of violence.
- Wilmington hosted a strong set of White Government Union clubs as well as an active group of Red Shirts. These men held rallies and paraded through African American neighborhoods brandishing guns on a regular basis.
- The city's major newspapers were full of Democratic campaign rhetoric and contributed to the increasing tensions by printing inflammatory articles concerning threats of black violence, reports of skyrocketing gun sales, glorified accounts of Red Shirt activity, and excerpts of speeches by men such as Alfred Moore Waddell.
- Waddell's role as a provocative speaker was central to the campaign. His speeches survive as examples of the extremes to which white Wilmington Democrats were willing to go in order to achieve victory.
- Support for the campaign grew on an almost daily basis, and Red Shirt activity increased in the days just prior to the election on November 8, 1898 as a means of intimidating and frightening blacks and white Republicans.

Chapter 3: Practical Politics: Writing, Speaking, and Riding in the 1898 Campaign

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary." -H. L. Mencken

In preparation for the 1898 elections, political parties began to develop their platforms and select candidates. As the election season began in full swing, the attention of North Carolinians was increasingly divided between national patriotism called forth as a result of the Spanish-American War and the brewing political fight in the state. ¹

The Spanish-American War was declared on April 14, 1898. President William McKinley had been monitoring the situation closely, and politicians had impressed upon him the potential financial rewards for the United States upon entry into the conflict. By the first of May, the United States was engaged with the Spanish in naval operations. Two months later, after an American victory at the Battle of San Juan Hill and the destruction of the Spanish fleet, the Spanish pressed for peace. As a result of a call to arms from President McKinley and Governor Daniel L. Russell, 106 Wilmington men enlisted in Company K, Second Regiment North Carolina State Troops, also known as the active component of the Wilmington Light Infantry (WLI); another contingent left as crewmembers on the Nantucket. Both Company K and the Nantucket crew left the state in pursuit of conflict, but neither saw action. Nantucket remained in port in South Carolina, and Company K drilled and marched in Raleigh and Georgia. The men had returned home on furlough by the fall.²

A large number of African Americans from North Carolina also enlisted to fight in the war after Governor Russell authorized the creation of a black battalion in April 1898. Russell appointed Major James H. Young as commander of the battalion, later mustered into service in July as the Third Regiment of North Carolina Troops. Unlike the Second Regiment, the Third remained in camp and service until it was mustered out in February 1899.³

The Democratic machine began to get more organized after the 1896 election even as the Fusionists became more and

docked in Havana, Cuba following rioting in the city between Cubans and the Spanish government. Most of Company K was mustered into service on May 13, 1898 and were mustered out on November 18, 1898. Donald MacRae brother of Hugh MacRae, was Captain. William Lord de Rosset, *Pictorial and Historical New Hanover County*, (Wilmington, N.C.:n.p.,1938), 89; North Carolina Adjutant General's Office, *Roster of the North Carolina Volunteers in the Spanish-American War*, 1898-1899 (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton and E.M. Uzzell, 1900), 79-81.

³ Wilmington's contribution to the roster of the Third Regiment was 40 privates, 16 officers, 1 musician, and 2 wagoners. The Third Regiment was camped near Fort Macon in the summer and fall of 1898, and its men would often visit Wilmington and other coastal towns. When the men visited, they enraged whites by demanding "equal treatment." The men were transferred from the coast to Tennessee in September where they remained throughout the rest of the campaign season. Some have speculated that if the men of the Third Regiment had also been furloughed and back in Wilmington by the fall of 1898, the election and ensuing violence would have been different. Roster of North Carolina Volunteers in the Spanish-American War, 92-117; Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "North Carolina's Negro Regiment in Spanish-American War," North Carolina Historical Review 48 (October 1971): 370-387.

¹ During a white supremacy rally and parade, ladies along the parade route waved both U.S. and Cuban flags. *Wilmington Messenger*, November 4, 1898.

² The final act that precipitated war was the February 15th sinking of the U.S. battleship *Maine*, which was

more fractured and their cohesion eventually dissolved. Throughout Governor Russell's administration, splits between and within the Populist and Republican Parties grew despite attempts by Russell and Senator Marion Butler to prevent them. Republicans and Populists expected the Democrats' campaign lines as, for example, the 1897 Democratic State Committee declaration that the state had "fallen on evil days" that recalled "the days of reconstruction."

As the incumbent party, with their leader as governor, the Republicans should have been confident in their reelection possibilities. However, the party was fractured, and Russell garnered little support because of his "maverick" attitudes. He was seen by various factions as either a Populist or a Republican but not solidly either. Further complications arose because many Republicans, particularly African Americans, disliked Russell's decisions to appoint Populists to prominent positions. At the beginning of the 1898 election campaign season, Russell feared that he could not control an outright Republican convention as he had in the past and that a convention would result in a rejection of Russell's influence.⁵ His fears were realized when the party held its convention in July, and Russell was not invited to speak or participate in the proceedings. At the convention, the Republicans attempted to woo the Populists for another Fusion victory. In the face of mounting Democratic Party strength, the two parties managed a weak Fusion late in the campaign, long after the Democrats had begun their white supremacy mantra.⁶

The first to hold their convention in May 1898, in Raleigh, were the Populists. convention, arguments cooperation with both the Republican and Democratic Parties were bandied about, but, in the end, the party chose to set its own platform and began to chart its own course, waiting as it had in the past to court, and to be courted by, the other two parties. Dr. Cyrus P. Thompson and Marion Butler led the Populists during the campaign and repeatedly attempted to point out that the Democrats failed to address real issues facing North Carolina. Further, Populists, through a special supplement to The Progressive Farmer late in campaign, sought to prove that Democratic Party's campaign issues were contrived to support the agenda of a few "Democratic bosses." ⁷

Following the Populist convention by only weeks, the Democratic convention was also held in Raleigh. Leader Furnifold Simmons was bolstered by influential men such as Charles B. Aycock, Claude Kitchin, Locke Craig, Cameron Morrison, George Rountree, Francis D. Winston, Alfred Moore Waddell, and Josephus Daniels. A proposal of fusion with the Populist Party was soundly rejected by the convention, and, instead, a platform was adopted that reviled the two previous Fusion legislatures and their actions as part of "Negro Domination" and promised "rule by the white men of the State."

⁴ Crow, Maverick Republican, 117.

⁵ Not until later in the 20th century did North Carolina governors have the option to run for a second term. However, outgoing Governors traditionally wielded influence within their parties over selection of a successor candidate. Russell had lost control of the party through a series of conflicts related to Fusion politics and renewed African American distrust. McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 552; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 123-4.

⁶ A. E. Holton was Executive Committee Chair of the Republican Party during the 1898 campaign. Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 124-5; Daniel, *Editor in Politics*, 285.

⁷McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 525-533; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 285; *Progressive Farmer*, October 25, 1898.

⁸ McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 537-8; State Democratic Executive Committee of North Carolina,

Development of the **Democratic** "Machine"

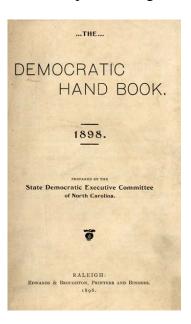
Furnifold Simmons led the development of the Democratic Party into a well-organized competitor tough, political offices beginning with the 1898 campaign. Nominated to serve as chair of the state Democratic Party in 1898, Simmons had long been involved in state and national politics. A New Bern attorney, he had served as chair of the Democratic Party during the successful 1892 campaign but resigned before the 1894 season and subsequent Democratic defeats in 1894 and 1896.⁹

Simmons used his organizational skills to rally supporters and press others into the Democratic fold. The approach, credited to Simmons as chair of the party, was to use newspapers, speakers rallies, and coercion to achieve victory. In the Democratic Party Handbook for the 1898 campaign and other literature generated by Simmons, he promoted a singular topic incumbent bad government by Republican Party—and developed themes pertinent to that topic, many related to white man's rule. He depicted whites who voted for Russell and Fusion as men who had been led astray and simply needed to be brought back to the Democratic ranks. 10

The Republican Party was characterized as the party of scandal and

Democratic Party Handbook, 1898 (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton, 1898).

poor results, leading to debt, ineffectual government, and abuses by officials. Further, the handbook asserted that the Republican Party was dominated by blacks, who forced white Republicans to accede to black wishes in order to advance to political office. The end result of this black/white relationship, according to Democrats, was



Democratic
Handbook, 1898
Image:
Documenting the
American South,
University of North
Carolina at Chapel
Hill

that unscrupulous and incompetent men of both races were allowed to rule state and local governments during Russell's administration. ¹¹

Further developing the argument, the handbook claimed that blacks outnumbered whites in several eastern counties even though the state featured a white majority overall. Their conclusion—"It is, therefore, manifest that the negro must enter as a factor into any plan, scheme or purpose for the administration of the public affairs of the State." ¹² The party stated that "this is a white man's country and white men must control and govern it" because they could manage government better than African Americans, who had demonstrated through

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⁹James Fred Rippy, *F.M. Simmons: Statesman of the New South, Memoirs and Addresses* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1936), 21.

The State Democratic Party Committee was comprised of Simmons as the Chair, John W. Thompson as Secretary, Francis Winston, and Heriot Clarkson. P. M. Pearsall was the head of the committee's public speaking department. Pearsall made 410 speaking appointments, with most for Charles B. Aycock. Pearsall was a close associate of Simmons, and wrote 50 to 150 letters a day on his behalf. Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 23.

¹¹ Democratic Handbook, 35.

¹² Democratic Handbook, 37.

Republican rule their inability to manage themselves and others. ¹³

Using Simmons these themes, developed a strong anti-Republican, antiblack stance for the Democratic Party. Like previous platforms, the 1898 strategy focused accomplishments on of Democrats when in power and preached the pitfalls of black officeholding. But, the 1898 campaign also took new paths in planning and preparation for the November elections. Simmons made effective uses of manpower through better party organization and control of county Democratic Party committees. County committee chairs received weekly correspondence from the state headquarters plus quantities of posters and circulars some two million documents statewide throughout the campaign. 14 Simmons' successful 1892 campaign was the organizational framework for the 1898 campaign, as he united business interests and citizen voters using claims of corruption by "Republican-Negro rule." 15



Furnifold Simmons Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

By uniting various entities that traditionally supported the Democratic Party, Simmons achieved victory. To fund his programs, Simmons quietly called on

¹³ Democratic Handbook, 38.

businessmen throughout the state and promised that the Democrats would not raise business taxes if his candidates were elected. 16 Josephus Daniels, a hearty supporter of the Democratic Party's white supremacy platform, recalled that Simmons was "a genius in putting everybody to work-men who could write, men who could speak, and men who could ride—the last by no means the least important." ¹⁷ Thus, victory was to be achieved through the unification of newspapers, traveling campaign speakers, and violent bands of men behind a singular argument—white supremacy.

Wilmington's position as the state's largest city governed by Populists and Republicans who were bolstered by a large black voting majority made it a perfect test case for Simmons' propaganda program. His print and speech program focused on the city with claims that it was under "negro domination." Articles from the city's pro-Democratic Party papers regarding local leaders were picked up and expounded upon by the News and Observer and the Charlotte Observer to demonstrate to the rest of the state the perils of non-Democratic Party leadership. To fuel the argument for the redemption of Wilmington, the News and Observer sent a correspondent to the city regularly to generate more fodder for the fever. 18 supremacy Wilmingtonians prided themselves that the Democratic Party's star speechmaker, Charles Aycock's, proclaimed that the city was "the center of the white supremacy movement." After hearing speeches at a party rally in Goldsboro in October,

¹⁴ C. Beauregard Poland, *North Carolina's Glorious Victory*, 1898 (Raleigh, N.C., 1899), 4.

¹⁵Rippy, Statesman of the New South, 19, 22-23.

¹⁶ Crow, Maverick Republican, 125.

¹⁷ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 284.

¹⁸ McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 583; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 283-312.

Josephus Daniels observed that "the cause of Wilmington became the cause of all." ¹⁹

Men Who Could Write

One of the most visible components of the 1898 Democratic campaign was the use of newspapers. Simmons enlisted the help of Josephus Daniels as editor of the Raleigh News and Observer to be the "militant voice of White Supremacy."20 Daniels, a long-time Democrat, was well connected to others in the state's ruling elite and, in 1894, collaborated with Julian Carr to purchase the News and Observer as a tool for the Democratic Party in its fight against Fusion. Using the News and Observer first as a barometer of public opinion and then as a weapon, Daniels and Simmons worked together to develop a strong argument against Fusion and in favor of white supremacy in order to win the 1898 election. The paper slowly introduced the white supremacy issue to its readers, fed stories to other papers, and worked the reading public a frightened and tense frenzy. Especially powerful were the News and Observers' editorial cartoons. Daniels had hired Norman Jennett to draw occasional political cartoons for the paper during the 1896 election season, and, by the 1898 Jennett's cartoons season. were ever present—both **Daniels** and Simmons considered the cartoons to be "one of the greatest factors in winning victories."21

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Daniels asserted that he used "every act and argument that we thought would serve to influence the white people" and credited his paper with headlines that "sealed the doom of Fusion." Later in life Daniels admitted that the paper was occasionally excessive in its bias toward Democrats and that stories were not fully researched before publication and probably could not be "sustained in a court of justice." He bragged that, because of the print campaign, "people on every side were at such a key of fighting and hate that the Democrats would believe almost any piece of rascality and the Fusionists got into the habit of denying everything." By the end of the campaign, the News and Observer was a powerful force in campaign rhetoric and portions of its articles were published nationwide. 22

Other editors held up the white supremacy banner and did all within their

provided by Carr, and, by the time of the 1898 campaign, his newfound skills were highly prized by his North Carolina backers. Daniels called Jennett's cartoons "hard-hitting" and claimed it was the first example of "cartooning in a North Carolina paper." After the election, Jennett returned to New York to work for the New York *Herald*. Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 147 – 150. The North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has digitized Jennett's cartoons and a sample of his work will be seen on subsequent pages. Access to the digitized cartoons is part of a larger website that explains the 1898 election:

http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/1898/1898.html

¹⁹ A large rally was held in Goldsboro in October with prominent speakers including Aycock and Waddell. Waddell's speech outlined numerous examples of "negro domination" in Wilmington and what he considered examples of bad Fusion government in the city to rally support for the campaign. Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 301; Hayden, *WLI*, 68; *Wilmington Messenger*, October 28-29, 1898; *Morning* Star (Wilmington), October 28, 1898. ²⁰ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 295.

²¹ Just as Carr had assisted in the start-up of the *News* and *Observer*, he assisted Jennett's efforts as well. Jennett attended art school in New York with funding

Historian Helen Edmonds claimed that the paper "led in a campaign of prejudice, bitterness, vilification, misrepresentation, and exaggeration to influence the emotions of the whites against the Negro." She further explained that the "cartoons were no less exciting and calculated to strike terror to unsuspecting whites." Daniels' impact on the 1898 campaign was so over arching that one writer claims Daniels was the "precipitator of the riot." Edmonds, Negro and Fusion Politics, 141; Alexander Weld Hodges, "Josephus Daniels, Precipitator of the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898" (honors essay, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990); Daniels, Editor in Politics, 284-5, 295-6.

power to publicize the actions Republicans and Democrats as part of the One vocal reporter, in larger campaign. some respects a tool of Daniels, was H. E. C. "Red Buck" Bryant of the Charlotte Bryant traveled the state to Observer. document the activities of the Democrats and to point out what he perceived as pitfalls of Fusion government. His work included much investigative work in Wilmington. In an effort to inflame white sentiment against "negro domination," he published an article about Wilmington that named Fusionist office holders in the city. ²³

Though the print campaign was successful, Furnifold Simmons was not satisfied with just circulating papers only to paying customers. As a method to entice newspapermen and spread the campaign further, Simmons solicited funds from within the Democratic Party to pay for subscriptions for those who otherwise would not have had access to papers such the Raleigh News and Observer or Wilmington Messenger. After the campaign, Simmons explained that he sought to reach the large number of voters who were "not immovably wedded to any party, but who love their State and will vote right if they are made to see what is to the best interest of the people and themselves." Simmons observed that many voters rarely read papers or attended speeches and that "if these good people could be reached and given the facts and thus brought to understand the horrible

²³ There are also indications that the *News and Observer* worked closely with editors and writers from the Atlanta *Constitution* and the Washington *Post*. Bryant later recalled that Wilmington's chief of police John Melton had "damned him" and that some in the city blamed his activities for instigating the race riot. "Simmons Hands: Lady-Like Touch Strong as Steel," n.d., H. E.C. Bryant Papers, State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Henry Edward Cowan Bryant;" "Red Shirts Organized," London Papers, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

conditions of misrule, corruption extravagance under the Fusionists they votes would certainly cast their discontinue power this unholy combination." ²⁴ Supported financially by men such as Durham industrialist Julian S. Carr, Simmons and his committee paid for 25,000 weekly papers to be sent directly to selected voters until the elections. The project was seen as a success, and more names were added to the subscription list. By the time of the election, the number of papers circulated using Democratic Party 40,000. funds reached Moreover, newspaper printers were paid to develop 50,000 four-page supplements to regular editions that were sent out with weeklies for the last two months of the campaign.²⁵

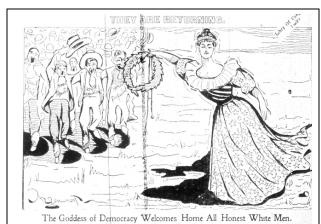


"A Serious Question -- How Long Will This Last?" News and Observer, August 13, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"A Warning. Get Back! We Will not Stand It." News and Observer, August 30, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



"They are Returning." *News and Observer*, September

16, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

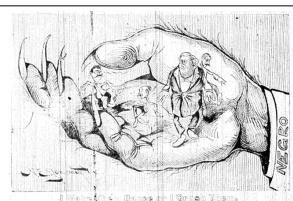


"The Confederate Soldier Has Played Out." *News and Observer*, October 6, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"The Vampire that Hovers Over North Carolina ." News and Observer, September 27, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"I Make Them Dance Or I Crush Them." *News and Observer*, October 12, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"The Source of the Governor's Inspiration." *News and Observer*, September 30, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"The New Slavery." News and Observer, October 15, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"They Can't Wash it Out." News and Observer, October

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



November 1, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"Don't Be Tempted By The Devil." News and Observer, October 26,1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"Good Morning! Have you voted the White Man's Ticket?" News and Observer, November 8, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina



"Why The Whites Are United. " News and Observer, October 28, 1898. Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



"The Game Is Ended." News and Observer, November 10, 1898.

Image: North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Men Who Could Speak

Another of Simmons' tools was his de facto speaker's bureau. Popular orators such as Charles B. Aycock, Robert Glenn, and Henry G. Connor traveled the state at Simmons' behest to boost the white supremacy platform. Simmons planned for most of the speechmaking to take place in the fall, aiming for early speeches to "keep up a running fire, and not enough to tire the people" in August and September even as the print campaign was already moving to educate readers as to the campaign's main During the last weeks of the tenets. campaign, Simmons had speakers whose rhetoric was peppered with local tales of the evils of Fusion rule and "negro domination" in every available town hall and commons. Particularly adept with rhetoric Wilmington native Alfred Moore Waddell, who spoke to rallies late in the campaign and pointed out numerous instances of the injustices heaped upon Wilmington as a result of Fusion rule. 26

Charles Aycock, a veteran speaker from earlier campaigns, traveled the state on behalf of the Democratic Party as its "voice." In May 1898, just before the Democratic State Convention convened, he "sounded the keynote of the 'white supremacy' campaign" in Laurinburg. 27 Because of his dedication to the Democratic Party, combined with his proven record of approval by the state's voters, Aycock was rewarded in 1900 with the governor's office. 28 Another well known speaker, one

who possessed restraint regarding racist strains of the 1898 campaign, was Henry G. Connor's correspondence and Connor. speeches repeatedly indicated that he was "willing to go a very long way to remove the negro from the politics of the state" as he was "managing a campaign of which I shall never be ashamed." Although definitely on the side of white supremacy, Connor reflected the concerns of conservative Democrats when he hoped "that the present conditions may pass away without violence or bloodshed and that our whole people may be wiser and understand each other better." He fully felt that once the Democrats regained power over the state, they should earnestly seek to improve the lives and education of blacks.²⁹

Men Who Could Ride

The newspapers and the speaker's circuit facilitated Simmons' goal to reach all types of people in the state. Illiterate or working-class people without subscriptions to papers responded well to speechmaking. Businessmen, clerks, and others with access to newspapers were given ample opportunity to read about the campaign's promises, Republican corruption, and their moral duty to vote for the Democratic ticket. The last component of the three-part campaign

suffrage and educational reform. Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s.v. "Charles Brantley Aycock." ²⁹ Connor wished "to speak to the negroes and let them understand how I feel towards them but, just now I would not be understood." In the 1898 campaign, Connor was elected to the state House of Representatives from Wilson County. Because of his work in the 1898 campaign, Connor was rewarded the post of Speaker of the House in 1899. Henry Connor to George Howard, November 11, 1898 and Henry Connor to George Howard, October 20, 1898, Henry G. Connor Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill; Josephus Daniels, "Henry Groves Connor," 1929, 7-9. Poland, Glorious Revolution, 34.

²⁶ Poland, Glorious Victory, 4.

²⁷Connor, *The Life and Speeches of Charles Brantley Aycock* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1912), xii.

²⁸ Connor, *Life and Speeches of Charles Brantley Aycock*, 61-72. Although he had been a candidate for governor and other political office in previous elections, Aycock was not a candidate for office in the 1898 campaign. He was elected governor by a large majority in 1900 on a platform of white

strategy was Simmons' goal to unite men who could "ride." Ostensibly, these men would assist in Simmons' plan to bring Populists back to the Democratic voting ring "practicable and through honorable means."30 To establish the first (and most organized) collaborative groups, Simmons enlisted the aid of Francis Winston of Bertie County to found White Government Union (WGU) clubs. The Democratic Party Headquarters in Raleigh planned the WGU movement for eastern counties with black voting majorities such as New Hanover, Craven, and Pitt. The WGU's popularity grew and eventually had over 800 chapters statewide.31



WGU Campaign Button Image: Cape Fear Museum

The WGU placed emphasis on individuals and their ability to make a difference in local politics. Further, the unions were a tool of the Democratic Party

³⁰ Preface inside WGU Handbook: "Our State is the

only community in the world, with a majority of white voters, where the officers selected to administer the Government are the choice of negroes and not of the whites. This condition has been brought about by an unfortunate division among the white people; and it is likely to continue until that division is removed, and unity again prevails among them as it did prior to 1892. The necessity for a closer union of the white people of the State is so apparent that it requires management and that necessity has called for the organization of THE WHITE GOVERNMENT UNION." Constitution and By-Laws of the White Government Union, 1898,

(Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1898), 2, Henry B.

McKoy Papers, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society,

as union members were charged to work in multiple capacities: guarantee participation by all white voters in the Democratic Party, report to local and state party chairmen concerning "doubtful and floating" voters who would be targeted for "efforts of the union to win the votes of such voters for the party," and to attend polls all day on election day. The WGU operated with a constitution and bylaws to define their goals and procedures. Produced and managed by the Democratic Party, the WGU was a well-oiled machine that featured four subcommittees: Committee on Registration, Committee on Campaign Literature, Committee on Speakers, and Committee on Challenges and Polls. The first three committees were to ensure all white men registered to vote, received campaign literature, and were treated to speeches. The fourth committee was to challenge illegal voter registration, deflect challenges against Democratic registrants, and attend polls on election day to ensure that all white men voted for the Democratic Party.³²

The WGU movement began in earnest in August and gained momentum as the election drew near. Other spin-off organizations that featured similar goals were formed in much the same manner as the WGU. One such organization was the Young Men's Democratic Club of Wilmington. Another, more visible and violent, was the Red Shirt, or Rough Rider, organization. The arrangement of men

Society, Wilmington, N.C.

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Wilmington, N.C. ³¹ Poland, *Glorious Victory*, 4.

White Government Union, Constitution and By-Laws of the White Government Union, 1898 (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1898), 2-8. William B. McKoy Papers, Lower Cape Fear Historical

³³ Roster of Young Men's Democratic Club of Wilmington, n.d. Merchant Account Book, Private Collections, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

³⁴ There has been no definitive differentiation drawn between the Red Shirts and Rough Riders. The Rough Riders expression was drawn from the 1st United States Cavalry Regiment organized during the

into bands of Red Shirts was unknown in North Carolina until the 1898 campaign. Prior to 1898, the Red Shirt phenomenon had originated and grown into a powerful white supremacy force in South Carolina under Ben Tillman and Wade Hampton.³⁵ The first appearance of Red Shirts in North Carolina occurred in Fayetteville in October At that rally, Tillman attended a 1898. parade that featured thousands of spectators and 200 Red Shirts. Also participating in the rally and parade were many White Government Union clubs and their guests, including delegations from Wilmington and other towns. 36

With but a short-lived rule in North Carolina politics, the Red Shirts were characterized by their distinctive red outifts, unconcealed weaponry, and blatant public displays of white supremacy propaganda. Although all levels of society participated in

Spanish American War under Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's Rough Riders were instrumental in American victory at the Battle of San Juan Hill and their bravery became widely celebrated.

35 Alfred Williams, in his history of the Red Shirts in South Carolina, wrote that the common explanation for the development of the red shirt as a uniform emerged during the 1876 campaign. In response to the use of bloodied shirts of murdered blacks as banners to rally Republican supporters, South Carolina Democrats countered the "bloody shirt" argument by wearing red shirts of their own in order to mock and belittle the Republican symbolism. Alfred Williams, Hampton and His Red Shirts: South Carolina's Deliverance in 1876 (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans and Cogswell Co., 1935), 105. For more on Tillman, see Francis Butler Simkins, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944) and Stephen Kantrowitz, Ben Tillman and the Politics of White Supremacy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³⁶ A recognized statewide leader of the Red Shirts was future governor Cameron Morrison. H. Leon Prather, "The Red Shirt Movement in North Carolina, 1898-1900" *Journal of Negro History* (April, 1977), 174-175; London Papers, Private Collections, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

the Red Shirt brigade, from wealthy businessmen to working-class farmers and laborers, the loudest and most visible members were considered hoodlums—making the Red Shirts effectively a terrorist arm of the Democratic Party. According to a contemporary, their unifying insignia, the red shirt, was of varying style and material, made of "calico, flannel or silk, according to the taste of the owner and the enthusiasm of his womankind."³⁷

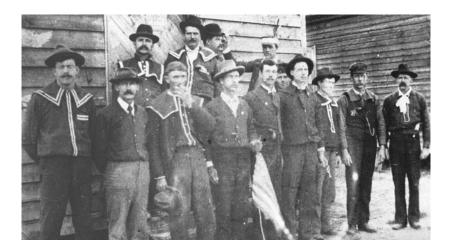


Red Shirt that belonged to Charles B. Aycock. It is unclear if he wore this shirt or if it was presented to him in 1898 or 1900

Image courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh.

Red Shirt and Rough Rider brigades typically paraded or rode horses in plain view in black communities, brandishing rifles and pistols. Because their actions were well known among African Americans,

³⁷ Just as the Ku Klux Klan had a short-lived usefulness for the Democratic Party, the Red Shirts were found for only the 1898 and 1900 elections. Prather, "Red Shirt Movement," 175; Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 293.



Armed Red Shirts in Laurinburg on Election Day, 1898

Image: State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh

most either hid in their homes or left. making neighborhoods appear to be vacant. Josephus Daniels believed that Red Shirt activity was successful because speechmaking and other forms intimidation failed to keep black voters away from political activity as effectively as did the Red Shirts. Throughout southeastern North Carolina, the Red Shirts rode day and night to intimidate black voters and to bully white Populists and Republicans into voting for the Democratic Party.³⁸

Although the organizational structure of the Red Shirts is unclear, the brigades were carefully orchestrated displays of Democratic Party militancy, used at intervals both to stir up white sentiments and to oppress black or Republican voters. The Red Shirt movement likely grew out of, or was managed by, the White Government Unions founded by the Democratic Party. Red Shirt rallies coincided with WGU activities and featured many of the same

speakers as those who stumped throughout the state on behalf of the Democratic Party. ³⁹

Thus, Simmons rallied together men who could speak, write, and ride to support the white supremacy campaign in a well-organized statewide effort. Daniels summed up the campaign when he observed that "every white man who could talk was on the stump; every white man who could write was writing, and every white man who could ride and could influence a vote was enthusiastically at work." ⁴⁰

Simmons and his committee took still more steps, including use of the clergy and women's influence, to convince white male voters that duty and responsibility obligated them to cast a Democratic vote. In a later campaign, Simmons wrote that he

³⁸ Several instances of Red Shirt intimidation of whites can be found. Most notably are the references given by Benjamin Keith in his autobiography and in testimony given during the 1899 contested election. W. J. Harriss, a white Republican, testified that Democrats continuously attempted to force him to join them, even women, who "made efforts to intimidate ... by remarks and tell me individually to come over and be a white man." Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 292-5; Prather, "Red Shirt Movement," 176; *Contested Election Case*, 387.

³⁹ Henry Hewett, Wilmington printer, testified that he was a member of the White Government Union and that he rode in the parade attributed to the Red Shirts and attended the speeches that followed in Hilton Park. For details of the planning and events surrounding the Laurinburg and Wilmington Red Shirt rallies, see articles in the *Wilmington Messenger* and *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 1-10, 1898. Further, John Bellamy testified that he knew "there were men, and they were gentlemen, many of them men of property and character and influence, who wore a red shirt at some of their political meetings as a simple badge of their Democratic club. *Contested Election Case*, 219-220, 252-253

⁴⁰ Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 294.

disliked "politics in the pulpit," he felt the use of the clergy was an important tool when in a campaign that threatened the "very foundations of our social order and Simmons also understood the morality." usefulness of women in campaigning and included ladies at every opportunity.⁴¹ The WGU recruited women members. As visual reminders of the responsibility of white men to protect them, women were invited to attend and even speak at political rallies uncommon occurrences in North Carolina politics up to that point. Other women participated in parades, fashioned banners for the cause, and cooked quantities of food rallies.42 for Simmons carefully orchestrated the campaign, opening discussions through printed media and a few speeches in late summer followed by fall speechmaking spectacles with parades and feasts in the last five weeks of the campaign.

Republican Reaction

After the Republicans and Populists realized the futility of working separately against the Democrats, they weakly fused their parties late in the election season but were ineffective in combating the wellorganized Simmons machine. 43 Republican and Populist leaders watched the Democrats gain steam but failed to organize themselves, scheduling few speeches and lacking a cohesive, strong print campaign. Russell warned his compatriots that they were in a "fight for our lives" because a "Democratic Legislature here means an orgy of deviltry the like of which has not been

⁴¹ R. L. Watson, "A Political Leader Bolts – F. M. Simmons in the Presidential Election of 1928" North Carolina Historical Review (October 1960):529, 539. ⁴² Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 98-99.

⁴³ Edmonds, Negro and Fusion Politics, 143.



Unidentified Wilmington woman, probably used as propaganda item. At the top of the photo was written "1898 riotess." An image of woman in a pure white dress, armed with a pistol and holster at her hip plus a rifle at her side could have been a powerful image for Wilmington men. If white women were willing to take up arms in their defense, so should their men. There are two almost identical images of this woman in the Bonitz collection.

seen."⁴⁴ Butler and other Populists reacted to the Democratic campaign by pointing out that the Democratic Party speakers did nothing but "howl 'nigger' from one end of the State to the other, hoping under the cover of the negro cry, to get men elected to the legislature" who would place corporate interests ahead of the needs of the average citizen. ⁴⁵

African American Republicans also feared the outcome of the Democratic Party

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⁴⁴ Daniel Russell as quoted in Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 126.

⁴⁵Caucasian (Clinton), September 22, October 27, 1898 as quoted in Crow, Maverick Republican, 127.

campaign. Early in the campaign season, black leader James Young cautioned that if the Democrats returned to power, blacks would be disfranchised.⁴⁶ As a response to the rhetoric of the Democratic campaign, Republican congressman George H. White and Populist representatives met with President McKinley at intervals to warn the president about the "unholy war that Democrats are making on the color line" and to ask for assistance. Democratic partisans picked up on the visits and made headlines out of the visits to Washington. One rumor circulated that North Carolina senator Jeter Pritchard had visited with President McKinley and had requested federal troops for the state to ensure a fair election. Pritchard replied that he had not requested troops but, instead, had alerted the President to the situation in the state and had stressed to the president that Governor Russell should exhaust his resources before federal troops were called in. Another news item circulated that Pritchard had written to Attorney General John Griggs asking for assistance in the form of troops—evoking the specter of Reconstruction. It was reported that the president's cabinet discussed the idea and decided that no troops would be sent unless Governor Russell requested them or mail was disrupted. The editor of the Wilmington Morning Star added that "Federal troops cannot legally be ordered to any State to preserve the peace until both civil and military powers of the State have been exhausted." President McKinley reportedly handed the matter over to his attorney general for consideration. In an interview, Griggs was quoted as saying that "if

⁴⁶ Young became a target of Daniels and the Democratic Party. Daniels later admitted that he was harsh on Young during the campaign. Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 124.

necessary to preserve order troops will overrun the State." ⁴⁷

In addition to their political troubles, leading Republicans the state's Populists faced threats to their personal Populist senator Marion Butler safety. endured being pelted with rotten eggs while giving speeches, and both Governor Russell and Butler were threatened with personal More than most politicians, Governor Russell was the target of Red Shirt hatred. As a result of his treatment, Russell resorted to using armed bodyguards to protect him even in the Governor's Mansion. A culminating event occurred while returning to Raleigh after a trip to Wilmington on election day to cast his ballot. Upon his return to Raleigh, Russell's train was stopped and boarded by Red Shirts in Hamlet and Maxton. Russell's life was saved only because railroad officials were warned of the impending threat and helped move the governor to the rear of the train into a baggage car. 48

⁴⁷ Morning Star (Wilmington), October 25, 1898; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 637; Crow, Maverick Republican, 124, 127; Daniels, Editor in Politics, 302; Wilmington Messenger, October 26, 1898.

⁴⁸ At the stop in Maxton, Russell and the railroad employees were warned by Red Shirt leader and future governor Cameron Morrison that his life in danger. Morrison and some of his men remained on the train and when the train was searched in Hamlet, Russell was hidden for his safety. According to the newspapers, Russell was met by approximately 100 Red Shirts in Maxton. The Wilmington Messenger reported that the Red Shirts "appeared to be in for a good time" and that Russell "took their visit good naturedly." This article appears to refer to Morrison's activity. Prather, We Have Taken a City, 101-2; Wilmington Messenger, November 10, 1898; Daniels, Editor in Politics, 290, 303-4; Crow, Maverick Republican, 134; Douglas C. Abrams, Progressive-Conservative The Deal: 1920 Democratic Gubernatorial Primaries in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, 55 (October 1978: 426.